DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 468 586 HE 035 269

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TITLE	The Changing Academic Workplace.
PUB DATE	2002-09-18
NOTE	11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Salzburg Seminar Universities Project Symposium (22nd, Salzburg, Austria, September 17-22, 2002).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*College Faculty; *Educational Change; *Faculty Workload; Higher Education; Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Role; *Work Environment

ABSTRACT

Three aspects of academic career orientation have changed as a result of forces within and external to universities, and these changes have fundamentally altered the nature of the workplace for faculty members, resulting in serious challenges for the leadership of institutions. The changes occurred in: (1) the understanding professors have of their universities' purposes; (2) professors' identification with their employing institutions; and (3) faculty motivation to engage vocationally in academic work. In many institutions these changes have been recognized clearly, and there is a full awareness of the dangers inherent in them. In some institutions, these challenges have resulted in successful transformation, in institutional revitalization that may have been overdue anyway. (SLD)

The Changing Academic Work Place

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September 18, 2001

THE CHANGING ACADEMIC WORKPLACE

By

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Salzburg Seminar Universities Project Symposium on "Academic Career Patterns"
Salzburg, Austria – September 18, 2002

Our task is to review how changes in universities over the past three decades have altered working conditions for the academic profession. In addressing this subject, I shall comment on three aspects of scholarly career orientation that I believe to be quite different today from what they were thirty years ago when I was chairing a graduate department with some twenty faculty members. My remarks should be interpreted with the following qualifications in mind:

> (1) the experience from which they derive is restricted to my own observations during a professional career of almost forty years in several North American universities (mostly Canadian), to my studies as a scholar in the field of higher education policy and management, and to my brief engagements at institutions in about thirty other countries (most recently through participation in half-a-dozen Salzburg Seminar visiting advisor missions for establishments in Armenia, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Russia (including two in Siberia);
>
> (2) in necessarily generalizing, I am conscious of the fact that exceptions can be found to virtually everything I say because of the great variation in the circumstances of universities – not only internationally and among those within a country, but internally at each institution as well; and
>
> (3) time constraints enforce selectivity, so much more can (and I hope will) be said on these subjects than I can possibly say now.

Notwithstanding these limitations, let me press on recklessly to share some personal views on

three aspects of academic career orientation that I believe have changed as a result of forces both within and external to universities, that have fundamentally altered the nature of our workplaces for faculty members, and that constitute serious challenges for the leadership of these institutions: (1) the understanding professors have of their universities' purposes, (2) their identification with their employing institutions, and (3) their motivation to engage vocationally in academic work. My focal group includes both current and potential staff.

Understanding of Institutional Purpose

There is substantial variability, both within universities and between them and the broader society, in people's perceptions of what these institutions are expected to be and to do. This can result in considerable confusion on the part of those contemplating or pursuing academic careers. Three examples will suffice.

First, the basic mission of higher education has traditionally been élitist – to identify the best and brightest of our younger generations and equip them with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to enjoying fulfilled lives and to providing societal leadership; this continues to be a prominent expectation of universities in the view of many stakeholders. Recently, however, a different (and somewhat conflicting) priority has emerged for our institutions; it is typically referred to as "massification" and reflects the view that higher education is a public good that should be available to all who are willing and able to engage in it, which has profoundly changed the student populations of our universities and the nature of the work that their instructors must do. Moreover, universities have become recognized in many countries as agents of social change and drivers of economic development – not only through their teaching function

but especially as generators of knowledge that can solve problems, foster innovation, promote prosperity and contribute significantly to nation-building and civil society through their research and service functions. These differing expectations regarding the mission of higher education carry diverse implications for the nature of work in which academic staff should engage and, since most universities strive to meet all of them, faculty members can become understandably confused about what they are there for.

Secondly, the cultural values that shape the policies and behaviours in universities have been undergoing some changes in recent years – due in part not only to the mission alterations I've noted but also to social movements and to financial cutbacks. Traditionally, higher education has been characterized by a devotion to such principles as scholarly excellence, intellectual merit, and academic freedom. These values have been supplemented of late by a couple of trends that require modifications in the academic workplace. One is represented by what has been subsumed under the label of "political correctness" and is reflected in such concepts as employment equity, affirmative action, academic accommodation, gender-neutral language, zero-tolerance for discrimination, and harassment-free environments – ascribing to our institutions a social engineering role. The other has been characterized as the "corporatization" of universities and takes the form of management practices imported from the business sector, partnerships with private enterprises, and pressures to act entrepreneurially in order to generate revenues and stimulate economies. Because these various value systems inevitably conflict with one another as behavioural guides, faculty members can become understandably confused about what they should do.

Thirdly, the traditional three-part role of academic staff – research, teaching, and service –

has become greatly complicated. On one hand, the demands of the research function have escalated as technology has become more sophisticated and expensive, grants have become more restrictive and competitive, and scholarship has become more regulated and multidisciplinary; yet, institutional prestige depends largely on productivity in this domain and so the pressure on faculty to achieve international recognition as successful researchers is immense. On the other hand, for several reasons and in various ways that I have examined elsewhere (1), the last two decades have witnessed a renewed interest in the importance of our teaching function (especially at the undergraduate level, which accounts for most of our student enrollment and tuition revenue) and a determination to redress the typical undervaluing of this role in the work of academics; thus, prospective professors are now expected to demonstrate teaching competence in the selection process, to employ advanced technologies in their instructional practices, and to embrace multidisciplinarity in the courses they offer (2). At the same time, increasing demands for our institutions to play a leading role in developing national economies and fostering civil societies have invigorated an emphasis on the traditionally neglected service function of today's universities; faculty are thus urged to get out of their classrooms, offices and laboratories and to apply their expertise in the "real world". The growing complexity and increasing priority of all three academic roles – research, teaching, and service – renders it virtually impossible for a single professor to perform them all well, but provisions to facilitate differential workloads are rare; thus, again, faculty members become understandably confused about where they should expend their efforts.

These examples illustrate my first point – that a perplexing complication and an unclear understanding of institutional purpose have arisen over the past three decades, and that the

resulting confusion on the part of current and potential faculty members constitutes a significant alteration in the academic workplace.

Identification with Employing University

Another contextual change that I have observed over the period concerned is a reduction in the degree to which academic staff identify with their employing institutions: the extent of their loyalty and commitment to their "own" universities has waned. While it must be acknowledged that professors, especially in "research-intensive" universities, have characteristically behaved more as "cosmopolitans" than "locals" in Gouldner's terms (3) – i.e., their orientation to colleagues in their specialist disciplines elsewhere has been stronger than their affiliation with the direction of their own institutions – this tendency has been exacerbated by several contemporary circumstances. Globalization and the information technologies accompanying it have intensified (and necessitated) the internationalization of scholarship, so it is often easier (and more productive) now for academics to collaborate with fellow researchers around the world than with those in their own departments; this, along with a trend toward "big research", also stimulates greater inter-institutional mobility among faculty members. In the teaching domain, academic staff are becoming disaffiliated from their employing universities by such factors as: the growing tendency in higher education (especially for financial reasons) to increase the proportion of instructional staff who are on limited-term, part-time, and other forms of non-tenure-track appointments; the emergence of "virtual universities" which contract with scholars to design and teach specific courses via the Internet without offering them any form of continuing regular employment (the so-called "rent-a-prof"); and the trend toward assigning single-course teaching

duties to graduate students and practicing professionals rather than full-time academic staff, especially in undergraduate classes and professional schools. And the emergent emphasis on the service function, almost by definition, compels faculty members to focus their attention outward, away from their employing universities, rather than immersing themselves in the affairs of their own institutions.

It has been remarked, however, that in many countries of the former Soviet Union and Central/Eastern Europe these centrifugal forces are blunted by a conventional lack of inter-institutional mobility (it is not uncommon there for academics to be employed by and remain at the universities where they were enrolled as students) and by a relative absence of strong national and international scholarly associations or learned societies that promote an external orientation through the intellectual infrastructure of conferences, journals, and other forms of extra-institutional peer exchange. Nevertheless, in several of these settings it is common for faculty members to have two or more different employers in order to supplement the inadequate salaries that their universities can offer in these difficult times of economic transition -- and thus, they necessarily have split loyalties.

So my second point is that a variety of factors, both internal and external, have contributed over the past three decades to a decline in faculty members' identification with their employing universities and that this, too, represents a change in the nature of our academic workplaces.

Motivation to Engage Vocationally

Finally, there are conditions on our campuses themselves that serve to reduce one's

satisfaction in the workplace and the motivation to become vocationally engaged there. The problems I mentioned of ambiguous expectations and role conflict are frequently exacerbated by tremendous pressures to produce and often overwhelming workloads. And the decline I have noted in professors' commitment to their employing universities may be perceived as responsive to (or even caused by) a reciprocal decrease in the institutions' commitment to their academic employees. Too often, our operational policies and practices succeed more in exacerbating these problems than in ameliorating them; thus, their effect has been to propel changes in the academic workplace, particularly those that may be viewed as negative in result (although this is less common in western countries than elsewhere). Among them are faculty salaries that are grossly inadequate and working conditions that are sometimes appalling (no offices, dirty buildings, meagre libraries, obsolete laboratories, autocratic managers, insufficient support staff and equipment, etc.). Opportunities for performance evaluation and professional development are sadly lacking in many universities, and the reward systems that are used carry little incentive to advance (indeed, some contain no linkage between academic salaries and career progression). Also, the bureaucratic mentality that characterizes much of higher education (especially where faculty members are effectively employees of state governments that are often geographically remote) is counterproductive in situations where an entrepreneurial orientation is essential to institutional survival.

Conditions such as these cause a drop in job satisfaction and employee morale, and they diminish the status of university work in the general public's view. Professors often feel unappreciated, unsupported and unguided, which can create a climate of uncertainty and insecurity in which one fears the prospect of unemployment – a concern shared in the west, with

tenure-denial lawsuits constituting "the fastest growing area of academic litigation in the U.S." (4). As a consequence, one's motivation to fully engage in the pursuit of an academic career is diminished; and this demotivational trend threatens the viability of our institutions and certainly represents a change in the academic workplace over the past three decades.

Conclusion

In summary, I have outlined three dimensions of change in the academic workplace related to scholarly career orientation that I have observed over the last thirty years: understanding of institutional purpose, identification with employing university, and motivation to engage vocationally. In all cases I have stressed the problematic features of these changes, noting that they can lead to confusion, insecurity and disengagement on the part of current and potential faculty members. The consequences may include a dangerous shortage of well-qualified candidates for appointment to academic positions, a high rate of faculty turnover, and a serious risk of institutional stagnation or deterioration. These changes thus constitute a severe challenge for university managers, for it is they who must lead initiatives to reduce or prevent the kinds of negative impact that I have sketched.

Let me conclude by stressing that I am by no means as pessimistic as might be inferred from my remarks. In most of the institutions I have observed, such changes in the academic workplace have been clearly recognized and there is full awareness of the dangers inherent in them. In many (both in the west and in the former Soviet Union and Central/Eastern Europe) I have been impressed by the creativity and determination with which certain university leaders are confronting these challenges. And in some, the challenges have been successfully transformed

into opportunities for institutional revitalization that was perhaps overdue anyway. It is my hope that a few of these success stories will be shared here, to the benefit of us all.

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